FRIENDS OF FISHBOURNE ROMAN PALACE

NEWSLETTER

Issue no. 54 **February 2025**

The Bull's Head mosaic?

The brand new official guide book by Dr Miles Russell has now been printed and delivered, much to the relief of the staff at Fishbourne, who have been patiently waiting for years.

The first section focuses on "The Site" and "A Chance Discovery" where it opens with this paragraph: "***Before 1960, no one in Fishbourne realised their village was built on the foundations of one of the largest Roman palaces north of the Alps. Roman material had been found around Fishbourne since the early 1800s. Part of a mosaic was found during the construction of the Bull's Head pub.***" This was news to us all on site as nobody had heard of a mosaic being underneath The Bulls Head so, I want to explore the early 1800s discoveries to see if the Bulls head pub really has a mosaic underneath it and if not where could it be in the village.

In the early 17th century a farmhouse was built to the west of Mill Lane but in 1780 it's described in the Land Tax List as "***a tavern called the Bulls Head***" (Hand , 2006). When the new owners, Julie Edwards and Roger Pocock took on the pub in July 1998 they had work done on the drains; the floors had to be dug up for the work to be completed. Julie and Roger say archaeologists from the Palace came along and discovered Roman piping, coins and pottery. On further investigation there was no evidence of any archaeologists doing an official dig and nothing has been catalogued or recorded. Finding documented accounts from the early 1600s has been quite difficult, I have yet to find one stating a mosaic was found during the construction of the farmhouse. It is possible Miles Russell has found evidence from that period which I would be very keen to read myself.

In 1728 the original Woolpack Inn was built, it was situated alongside the road which is right on top of the western most corner of the south wing. I'm not able to find any newspaper archives mentioning any discovery, though it could be that the records just don't exist anymore. The timbered framed inn was later demolished, and in 1936 the new Woolpack was built but this time it was positioned further back from the road leaving space for what is now the car park. Once again there is no mention of anything being found at the time of the demolition or building of the new Woolpack. So far it seems neither the Bulls Head or the Woolpack have any claim to having a mosaic underneath them.

I've found a handful of accounts from the early 1800s which shed light on the origins of this "Hidden Mosaic". Gentleman's magazine; **" *At Fishbourne, a village about a mile west of Chichester, was discovered about the 20th of March this year (1805), in digging by the road side for the foundation of a house, a tessellated pavement about 13 feet 6 inches in width. One end runs under a hedge, so that the length has not been ascertained. In the middle is a space about two feet in diameter, where the workmen found part of the base of a Column. A fine spring immediately under the floor gives probability to the supposition of it having been intended for a bath. It is paved with small black and white stones, but no figures or anything were found to convey any idea of the time or purpose of its erection, except two small copper coins of Vespasian. Several pieces of Roman cement, however, are picked up on the other side of the road; so that if the discovery were followed up with spirit, some valuable pieces of Antiquity might, perhaps, be found.*"**

Hampshire Chronicle, Saturday 30th March 1805 - **"*Last week, in digging about three feet below the surface of the earth, at Fishbourn, near this town (Chichester), a Roman tessellated pavement***

was found; also, some copper coins of the Emperor Vespasian, 70 years before the birth of Christ. Several other curiosities were discovered near the same spot."

Interestingly just over a year since the discovery of the mosaic, on Friday the 18th of April 1806, an auction was held at The Bull's Head for a house which was said to have been ***"delightfully situated commanding pleasing views of the harbour and a beautiful featured inland country, it could boast a curious Roman pavement 13ft square."*** (Cunliffe, B. (1998). Fishbourne Roman Palace). We can't be certain that the auctioneer wasn't embellishing the advert with the previous year's exciting discovery to drum up more buyers.

One more early 1800s source of note is from James Dallaway's A history of the western division of the county of Sussex 1815 page 540 - ***"In 1812, certain subterranean remains were found near the great Roman road, which passed through this parish from Regnum to Portus Magnus, leading to Southampton. Whether they were of a hypocaust or cold barth is unknown for the discovery was imperfectly made and inaccurately reported"*** Though on page 42 of the same book, when listing examples of discoveries for Sussex it states ***" At Chichester, the foundations of a temple; two tessellated floors, in 1723; and a bath near Fishbourne, in 1809"*** Subterranean remains is not a lot to go by, it could mean anything from a Roman bath house all way through to the foundations of a medieval cellar. I am a little unsure if the 1809 "bath" discovery is the same one that is talked about later on in the book. The book also states that in 1801 there were 26 houses in the parish of Fishbourne, a decade later it went up to 55. I wonder what other finds were discovered in this period due to the expansion of the village but have been lost to time as they were never properly documented.

I've concluded that the existing sources do not provide any evidence of a mosaic beneath The Bulls Head. It seems there has been some confusion, likely stemming from the mosaic discovered during the construction of a house, which was later sold at auction at The Bulls Head. I believe this misunderstanding is the basis for the statement in the current guidebook: "***Part of a mosaic was found during the construction of The Bulls Head***."

Sam Pettifor, Casual Visitor Supervisor at FRP (and research detective – Ed.)

Annual General Meeting

Please note the date of the AGM: **Saturday 12th April**. The formal notice, accounts, resolutions and proxy voting forms will be sent to members by 22nd March and nominations for election to the Committee should be received by 2nd April.

It is essential to have a quorum, which currently means 14 members (8 members + 6 Committee). Please show your support by coming for the whole day, and enjoy lunch and what will be an excellent talk by Matt Pope. "Ice Age Archaeology: From Chichester to Arundel".

Debbie Mansfield

Report from the Chair, January 2025

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2025. My last report was written at the end of September 2024. Since then, things have been relatively quiet with little to add to the activities of the Friends. On 5th October, I gave the last talk of the year. This was on 'Discovering Lavant Stone; the search for an unknown medieval and Roman building stone in the Chichester district'. This was a step back into my early days of historic building stone studies, which led to the recognition of a previously unknown local building stone that was widely used in Chichester Cathedral and extensively in medieval buildings in the area. The talk was well received and has now been picked up for inclusion in the lecture programme of two, possibly three, other groups in the Chichester area.

On 19th October, the Palace hosted the AGM of the Sussex Archaeological Society. To me, the numbers attending seemed to be less than usual which perhaps reflected the location of the venue in relation to the SAS membership. I was asked to make a short welcome to the attendees as part of the broader AGM introduction by Amanda Jones, Chair of Trustees. The overall message from the SAS AGM was the continuing concern about finances and the future of the organisation but with a glimmer of hope by the end of 2025.

Also, at the end of October, I attended another of the, now regular, meeting of the Chairs of the Friends of the different SAS properties. This time, the meeting was held in a somewhat chilly Anne of Cleeves House in Lewes. As usual, it was useful meeting to compare notes and learn about the much fuller engagement of the other Friends groups, unlike Fishbourne, in the daily running of their properties together with the delivery of a very full range of events and activities.

Our next event at Fishbourne is, of course, our Friends AGM on Saturday 12th April. Apart from the usual business (more about that below), we will be welcoming Dr Matt Pope to talk on "Ice Age Archaeology: From Chichester to Arundel", a topic that Matt has studied for many years. Matt is an Associate Professor at the UCL (University College London) Institute of Archaeology, and a Trustee of the Sussex Archaeological Society. He is an excellent and experienced speaker, not to be missed.

Now to the tricky business. The future of the Friends of Fishbourne Roman Palace needs your help, and several posts must be filled at the AGM:

Chair (myself, David Bone). Richard New (Treasurer) has offered but to do this, we would need a new Treasurer.

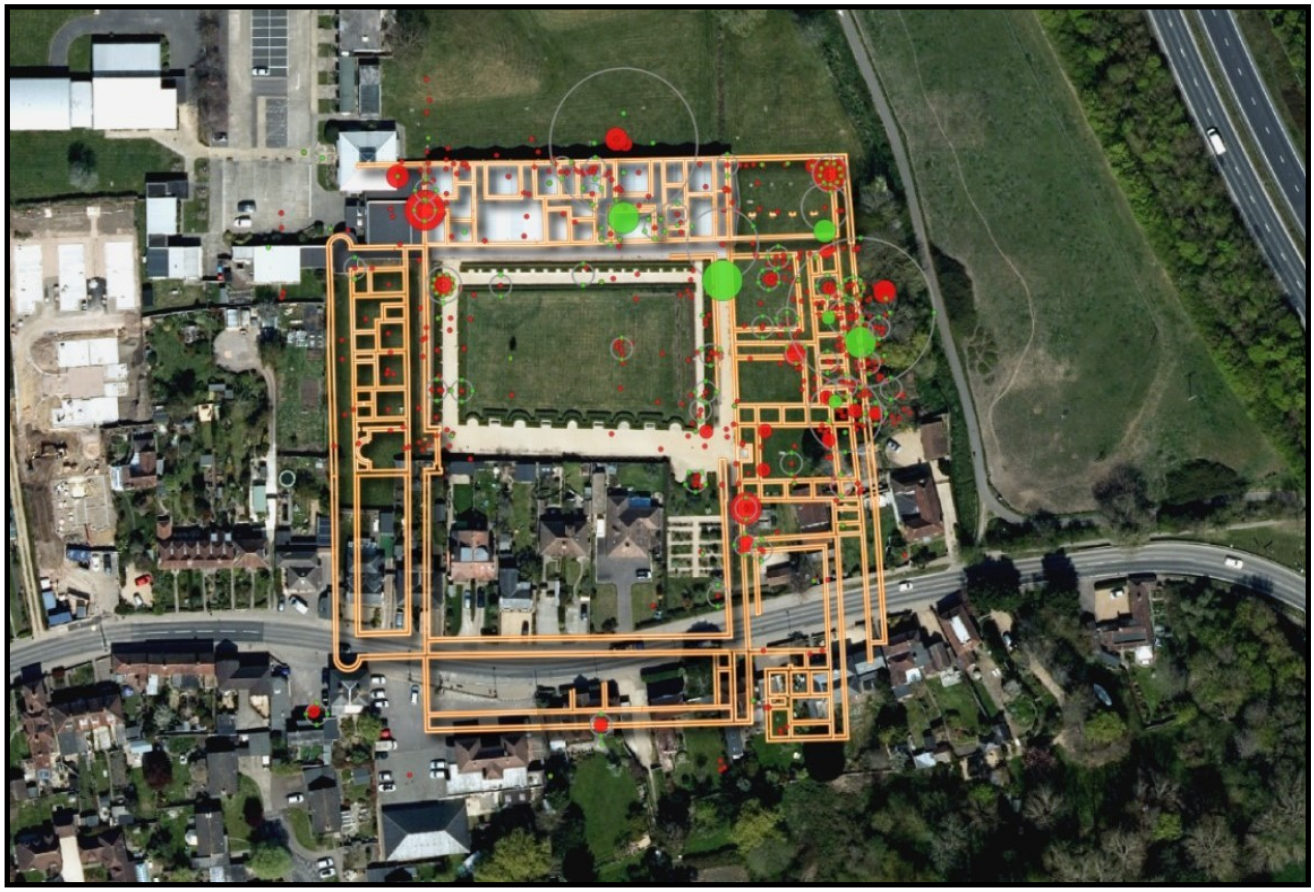
Secretary (Debbie Mansfield) wishes to step down.

Talks Programme Organiser. This position is now vacant and needs to be filled for the continuation of talks after the AGM.

Relevant papers for discussion and voting will be circulated prior to the AGM but advance offers to take on any of the above roles would be much appreciated.

David Bone

Mapping the finds



In the June 2024 Newsletter Rob wrote about some of the research and other work that goes on at the Palace out of sight of visitors. One of the projects he referred to was the digitizing of the archive site plans and excavation note-books. This is so that, for the first time, all of Cunliffe's plans can be viewed, and the relative locations of each trench and archaeological feature easily under-stood. By using this Geographic Information System (GIS) it is possible to see how objects relate to the site, and whether there are particular clusters – or gaps. In due course more details about individual objects will be added to the GIS data-base. Meanwhile this striking image illustrates some of the distribution data. It was published in the February edition of *Current Archaeology*, and the online version *The Past*; those of you who subscribe can see it and read Rob's accom-panying text.

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